

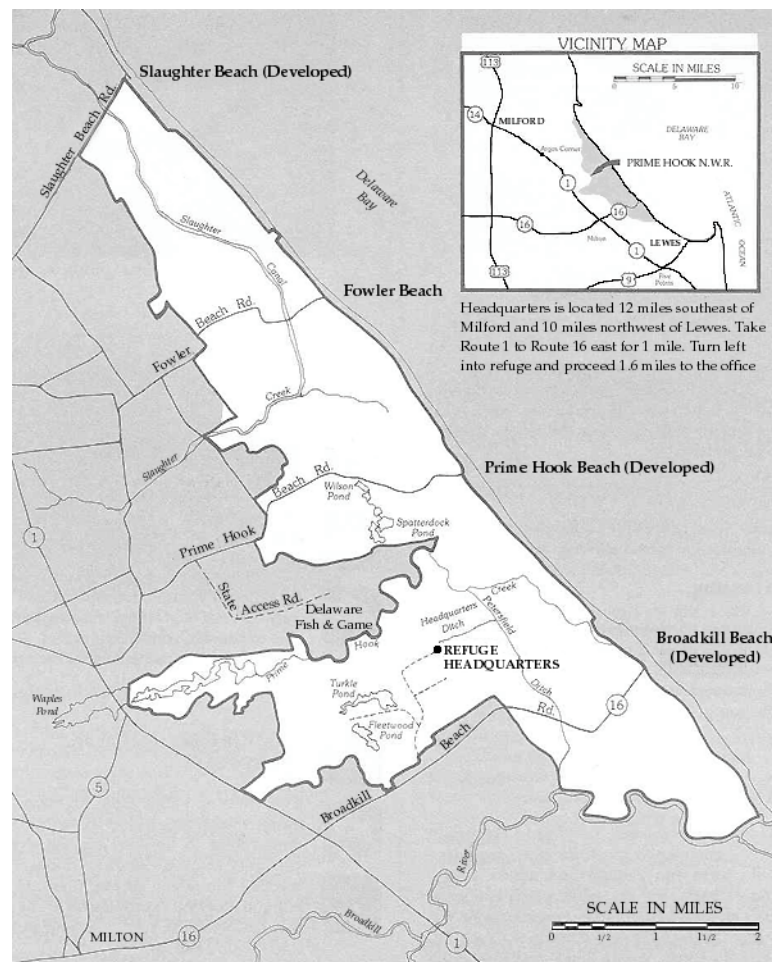
Field Report

Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge

■ 1.0 Summary

Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), 8,800 acres of wetland and forest located along the western shore of Delaware Bay, has a low need for Alternative Transportation Systems (ATS), primarily because of its low level of visitation. Bus transit would be difficult to implement because of the dispersed and disconnected character of the road system and the several points of arrival. Bicycling could be improved by paving the shoulders of the roads, however. Figure 1, from the Refuge brochure, provides a both a detailed map of the refuge and a location map.

Figure 1. Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge



■ 2.0 Background Information

2.1 Location

Prime Hook NWR is located along Delaware Bay in Sussex County, Delaware, approximately 30 miles southeast of the city of Dover and 20 miles northwest of the city of Rehoboth Beach. Access is via Delaware Highway 1.

2.2 Administration and Classification

Prime Hook is an NWR managed by the USFWS. The Refuge Manager is George O'Shea.

2.3 Physical Description

Prime Hook NWR, a major resting area for migratory birds, is 8,800 acres in size and consists mostly of fresh water wetlands, salt water marshes, forests and sand dunes. Several streams meander through it to the Bay.

2.4 Mission and Goals of the Wildlife Refuge

The mission of this Refuge is to provide habitat for hundreds of thousands of migratory waterfowl.

2.5 Visitation Levels and Visitor Profile

The estimated number of annual visitors is 75,000. Visitation is heaviest in spring (March to May) and fall (October and November) as people come to observe the shorebirds, ducks and geese. Other activities include wildlife education, fishing, crabbing and hiking. Approximately five percent of these visitors are from the immediate vicinity.

■ 3.0 Existing Conditions, Issues and Concerns

3.1 Transportation Conditions, Issues and Concerns

Four paved two-lane roads run east-west through the Refuge from Delaware Route 1 to provide access to the Refuge, four private beaches along Delaware Bay and 600 houses in three residential areas squeezed into a narrow strip of private land between the Refuge and the Bay.

Peak traffic is normally about 200 cars per day with about 1.3 people per car. Once or twice a year there is a “bird festival,” which draws about 600 cars. Most parking is on the shoulders of the roads as there is only one small parking lot (at the Refuge visitor center and headquarters).

3.2 Community Development Conditions, Issues and Concerns

As noted above, there are three unincorporated areas of residential development along Delaware Bay immediately outside the Refuge. These locations consist of single-family structures on either side of a local road that runs immediately behind the primary dune of Delaware Bay. Environmental impacts on the Refuge sometimes result from this development as there is allegedly harm done to the dune and, perhaps, to the wetlands to the west.

3.3 Natural or Cultural Resource Conditions, Issues and Concerns

The Refuge is exceedingly rich in wetlands, although human activity in the past has degraded their quality and harmed the general ecology of the region. The USFWS has been working to restore the quality of both land and water resources.

3.4 Recreation Conditions, Issues and Concerns

The primary recreational activity at this Refuge is bird watching. Although there are many birds attracted, it is sometimes difficult to access prime viewing areas because of the largely undeveloped nature of the Refuge.

There is no formal parking at the swimming beaches, which are outside of the Refuge along the Bay. Visitor conditions are better at the nearby Cape Henlopen State Park, which attracts about 250,000 people each year.

■ 4.0 Planning and Coordination

4.1 Unit Plans

The last plan for the Refuge was a “capacity assessment” performed in 1972. The next master plan is anticipated in 2002.

4.2 Public and Agency Coordination

Since there is no planning process underway for this Refuge no any major issues to be resolved, public communication is limited to the normal dissemination of information.

■ 5.0 Assessment of Need

5.1 Magnitude of Need

The need for ATS to the Prime Hook NWR is very low at this time. The level of visitation is modest, and the greatest transportation needs appear to be for better off-road parking, and accommodation of bicycles.

5.2 Feasible Alternatives

Transit services would be difficult to implement at Prime Hook because of low visitation, the dispersed and disconnected character of the road system and the several points of arrival. Bicycling could be improved by paving the shoulders of the roads, however.

■ 6.0 Persons Interviewed

George O'Shea, Refuge Manager